Hakuoh Journal of
the Faculty of Education
2009, 3 (2), 345－369

Note and Material

An Interview with Mr. Kiyoshi Omura, Shikoku's Bilingual 88-Temple *Sendatsu* ("Pilgrim's Guide")

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(I) An Introduction

Shikoku's 14,000 kilometer-long, 88-temple pilgrimage (四国八十八箇所) is a living symbol of Japanese cultural heritage with historic links to Kobo Daishi (弘法大師, 774-835). Unlike many other examples of Japanese religious observance, today the *henro* (遍路 or pilgrimage, as well as meaning the "pilgrim" him or herself) is attracting more participants, especially in the last fifteen years, and it represents a remarkably well-preserved pre-modern Japanese tradition, offering profound anthropological and sociological insights.

The official *sendatsu* (先達) or "pilgrims' guide" system was initiated in 1965 by the Shikoku 88-temple Reijokai (四国八十八ヶ所霊場会) for people or organizations who have completed the pilgrimage a set number of times and demonstrate an extensive understanding of the temples and traditions. As volunteer official *sendatsu*, these guides take people to the 88 temples and attempt to deepen their understanding of the experience. Currently there are about 8,500 official *sendatsu*, with Mr. Kiyoshi Omura (大村潔) being the only bilingual pilgrim leader/guide. (I met *sendatsu* Omura while on the pilgrimage in 2006 and have seen him several times since then. I deeply

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thank him for being so cooperative.)

This English interview with *sendatsu* Omura (who has completed the pilgrimage twelve times) explains: what a *sendatsu* guide is and why individuals seek to become *sendatsu*, his personal experiences, principle religious rites at the temples, mental and physical recommendations for pilgrims, about the *nokyocho* (納経帖 pilgrimage prayer books), the concept of *dogyo ninin* (同行二人making the pilgrimage together with Kobo Daishi), the custom of *o-settai* (お接待 giving/receiving alms), challenges being a *sendatsu*, and so on.

Although there is considerable research material available in Japanese, there are just a few English books about the Shikoku 88-temple pilgrimage, of which – Ian Reader's 2005 *Making Pilgrimages* – is the most up to date and academic work. As the pilgrimage is attracting more foreigners, *sendatsu* Omura and I hope that the publication of his English interview, the first of its kind, will help *henro* better appreciate the Shikoku pilgrimage.

(II) An Overview of the Shikoku 88-temple Pilgrimage

As a universal expression of human religious sentiment, pilgrimages connote ancient, arduous spiritual journeys to holy sites such as the Muslim *hajj* to Mecca – begun by the Prophet Muhammad in 632, the sacred destination of 3,000 year old Varanasi along north India's Ganges River, and the 1000 year old *El Camino de Santiago* trek to the shrine of St. James in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela (Spain), each visited by over 3,000,000, 1,000,000 and 100,000 pilgrims respectively last year. In Japan in the same year (2008), between 100,000 to 200,000 people completed the Shikoku 88-temple pilgrimage.

"I watch the worshipers stream by. They light their candles and their

sticks of incense, adding them to banks of flame and urns that issue clouds of scented smoke. They come singly, in families, and in tour groups marshaled by an amplified guide. The groups worship on cue and move out obediently but most of the others linger. A priest beseeches the saint's intercession for a petitioner who stands beside him. A young woman who has been bowed at the rail retreats and sags to a bench, her face streaked with tears. She sits tensed and anguished until an older woman, a stranger, moves to her and comforts her. 'The saint will help you. He will. He will.' Presently they move together to stand again before the tomb. The old woman's voice rings out as they chant a litany of homage. The girl's voice, faint at first, becomes stronger and her back straightens." (Statler, 1983, 21)

In late Heian era Japan (794-1185), continental philosophic Buddhism was undergoing a change from an aristocratic religion – initially used by the government to politically unify the country hierarchically – to more faith based participatory sects for the common people. Out of this intense flux arose ascetic practices, often on mountaintops or by the sea.

"The (Shikoku) *henro* was one of several pilgrimages that emerged in the latter Heian period linked to the activities of religious mendicants and wandering proselytizers known as *hijiri* (聖).... (who) emphasized pilgrimages to important temples and other holy places as a way of deepening faith, attaining salvation.... Among such pilgrimages was the *Kumano mode* (熊野詣で).... Another was the *Saikoku sanjusankasho junrei* (西国三十三カ所巡礼), the thirty-three-temple Saikoku pilgrimage, which begins in Kumano." (Reader, 2005, 107-8)

Whereas the Saikoku 33-temple pilgrimage was linked to centers of political power and high culture, the Shikoku pilgrimage was not. Also, the former pilgrimage is focused on devotion to 33 enshrined Kannon (観音) images, while the Shikoku pilgrimage has no such unity (not even of a single Buddhist sect) other than the connection to Kukai (空海, an earlier name for Kobo Daishi) who was born close to Zentsu-ji, the 75th temple of the 88. However, both pilgrimage routes seem to share the same late Heian ascetic roots. "The Kobo Daishi route, the most vital of all of Japan's pilgrimages, completely circumambulates the island of Shikoku and also includes a visit to Mt. Koya." (Readicker-Henderson, 1995, 9)

> "The earliest evidence of a pilgrimage comes in the late twelfth century, when two texts, the *Konjaku monogatari* and the *Ryojin hisho*, mention a pilgrimage-like ascetic practice in Shikoku.... Shinjo Tsunezo thinks that devotion to Kukai/Kobo Daishi led Shingon ascetics from Koyasan to visit places in Shikoku associated with his life, establish an austerity around the island, and turn Shikoku into a 'holy land' (*seichi*, 聖地)." (Reader, 2005, 108)

Like the associations between the *Lotus Sutra* (法華経) and the number 33 in the Saikoku route, it is assumed that 88 must have special significance for the Shikoku pilgrimage. The four leading (but not mutually exclusive) theories about the number are: the total of the *yakudoshi* (厄年) misfortunate years for a man (42), woman (33), and child (13); the 88 evil passions (*bonno*, 煩悩); the division into eight of Shakyamuni's remains multiplied by the ten Buddhist realms, plus the original eight equaling 88; and/or the ideogram for rice (米) which is made up of the three characters八十八. (Reader, 2005, 277-278)

The origins for the shift during the late Heian and early Kamakura eras toward more indigenous experiential sects of Buddhism for the common people – led by clerics such as Honen (法然, 1133-1212), Shinran (親鸞, 1173-1263), Dogen (道元, 1200-1253), and Nichiren (日蓮, 1222-1282) – can be found in the importation of esoteric Buddhist practices by Kukai and Saicho (最澄, 767–822) from China several hundred years earlier. Long after their individual passing, Kukai's Shingon sect (真言宗) headquarters at Kongobu-ji on Mt. Koya and Saicho's Tendai sect (天台宗) base at Enryaku-ji on Mt. Hiei served as centers of Buddhist learning and storehouses of various doctrines. From these sites, charismatic priests could find the theological bases for their formulaic new sects.

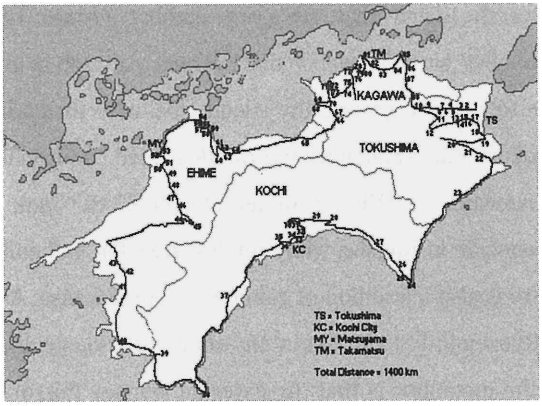
> Therefore, it seems "the explanations that focus on Buddhist cosmology and the eradication of evil passions are most likely – and that they probably emerged due to influences from Koyasan and esoteric Buddhism. The number 88 became part of the *henro* landscape in the seventeenth century... when Shingon priests and others with connections to Koyasan played a significant role in developing the pilgrimage." (Reader, 2005, 278)

In Shikoku University professor Tanaka Shozo's article in the 2002 *Shikoku's 88 Sacred Sites, Kukai & Pilgrim Culture* exhibition catalog, he puts forward the three leading possibilities for when the Shikoku 88-temple pilgrimage came into use as: (1) during the Heian era during the life of Kukai, (2) sometime afterward but in the medieval era – thanks to the activities of Koyasan-based monks, or (3) during the Edo period (1603-1868), before stating his conclusion that the 88-temple pilgrimage route evolved during the Nabokucho era (1336-1392) because of the evidence of

the overlapping of current temple sites and places of political and military importance. Also, he refers to a 1471 inscription with "the first reference to the 88-temples." (Tanaka, 2002, 214)

The restoration of national peace after the battle of Sekigahara in 1600 led directly to the establishment of the Tokugawa or Edo era, ending 150 years of civil conflict, but also resulted in rather strict control of unofficial movement from region to region around Japan. Furthermore, during the prolonged hostilities the Tendai headquarters of Enryaku-ji had been razed, however the Shingon center at Koyasan was untouched. Other effects of Tokugawa Shogunate rule were the severe suppression of Christianity and the severing of almost all international relations. However, a special permit from one's fief to go on a pilgrimage was one of the exceptions to the ban on domestic travel (going overseas was a capital offence).

The island of Shikoku, Japan's smallest and least populated main island – from 1988 linked to Honshu by the Great Seto Bridge – consists of four prefectures: Tokushima (formally Awa), Kochi (formally Tosa), Ehime (formally Iyo) and Kagawa (formally Sanuki). The pilgrimage is made up of 88 temples in five large clumps (numbers 1-22, 28-36, 44-53, 54-64, and 68-86) with several long stretches in between (see map on the next page). The present order, beginning with Ryozen-ji (霊山寺) in Tokushima City, may have evolved due to its proximity to the port from which pilgrims could have come from Shingon headquarters on Mt. Koya across the channel, and seems to have evolved from the seventeenth century or earlier.



"When I began my pilgrimage I was puzzled and I asked the priest, why is this temple Number One? Wouldn't it be more logical to begin at Kobo Daishi's birthplace? The very first guidebooks for the pilgrimage, more than three centuries ago, told pilgrims to start there, yet the temple is marked Seventy-five. The priest told me of a tradition that pilgrims should begin by visiting the Daishi's tomb on Mt. Koya, as I had done. Coming down from Koya and crossing over to Shikoku, they arrive near here. And so, the temples acquired numbers, this became One." (Statler, 1983, 25-26)

"An uncontrollable emotion sprung up from my heart.... I had never felt so strongly before. I was part of the Inland Sea, part of the mountains and part of the island as I began to walk.... to visit the eighty-eight temples on the island (of Shikoku), and known as the oldest pilgrimage of Japan for more than a thousand years.... Those who have experienced the Shikoku Henro often say, 'Take us one more time around the island!'" (Miyata, 2004, 9-10)

In addition to the currently designated 88 temples – creating a natural mandala or

cosmic map over the island – there are a large number of *bangai* (番外), literally "outside the number" sites of devotion that pilgrims may stop at along the way. It is common to proceed around the island clockwise through the first 23 temples in Tokushima "awakening the Buddha mind," to Kochi for temples 24-39 for "austerities," to Ehime for temples 40-65 to "open the Buddha mind," and conclude in Kagawa with temples 66-88 for "full enlightenment." However, there is also a tradition of going counter-clockwise. And, one need not start at Ryozen-ji, but can begin anywhere. Obviously, like all human pilgrimages the metaphor is that the external journey mirrors an internal quest toward enlightenment. Furthermore, as – according to legend, Kukai himself walked the route in 815, his personal *yakudoshi* 42 year of misfortune – each *henro* walks in Kobo Daishi's footsteps, or more figuratively as "the person 'doing the same practice' referring not just to Kobo Daishi but also to an accompanying spirit of the dead." (Reader, 2005, 80)

(photographs by J. Miller of signs along various Shikoku pilgrimage routes: left, *Dogyo ninin* "going together with Kobo Daishi"; center, *Namu daishi henjo kongo* "Hail to Daishi the universally resplendent diamond"; and right, *Henro michi* "pilgrim path.")

Premodern pilgrims walked, but things are different now. "The Waseda

survey shows that at least 70 percent of all pilgrims in the late 1990s went by bus or car, with virtually half (49 percent in all) doing it in the company of eleven or more more people." (Reader, 2005, 99) There are many differing personal reasons to make the pilgrimage.

> "After dinner it seems like a good idea to meet some of our fellow *henro* (all but we are traveling by chartered bus).... One of them has with him the album carried by his grandfather when he twice made the pilgrimage, in 1903 and 1905; 'My father did the pilgrimage too, and I hope my son will.'... A third shows a little bag that hangs from his neck. It holds his wife's ashes. 'She died almost a hundred days ago,' he says.... He smiles: 'I feel that I am traveling with her.'" (Statler, 1983, 33)

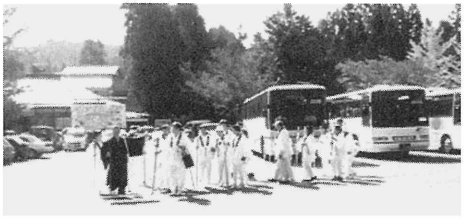
In two temples (numbers 30 and 32) in Kochi, *henro* Statler finds two English inscriptions by Frederick Starr, "the first foreigner to perform the pilgrimage.... (in) 'Taishi 10. 3. 4.' (March 4, 1921).... The first one I spot is at Temple thirty-two: Peace and International Friendship." (Statler, 1983, 237) The second 1921 Dr. Starr inscription appears immediately below.

Frederick Starr's calligraphy at Temple Thirty

(Statler, 1983, 245)

Today, most pilgrims still wear at least some of the traditional *oizuru* (笈

摺) white garb – the color of purity and death – and carry a *kongo-tsue* (金剛杖) or walking staff (as well as being a symbol of Kobo Daishi). Fewer wear the traditional bamboo hat and straw sandles. However, almost every pilgrim has *osame-fuda* (納札) with an invocation to Kobo Daishi and usually their names that he or she leaves at each site, as well as a *nokyocho* (prayer book) hanging scroll or pilgrim's overshirt to be inscribed and stamped at each site. Each designated temple has an office, usually open from 07:00 until 17:00, where the prayer books, scrolls, or shirts are inscribed and stamped for a small fee. Furthermore, each temple has two halls of worship, the main hall (or *hondo*) in which the image of veneration is enshrined and the *daishido*, or hall dedicated to Kobo Daishi. Pilgrims light candles, burn incense, make a monetary offering, pray (often reciting the "*Namu daishi henjo kongo*" or "Hail to Daishi the universally resplendent diamond") invocation, and possibly chant the Heart Sutra (*Hannya shingyo*), often with an official *sendatsu* or guide to deepen their understanding.



(photographs by J. Miller: left, pilgrims leave their busses; right, a different group arriving at Shoryo-ji 青龍寺 – number 36 – outside of Kochi City, Kochi Prefecture.)

(III) The Interview with *Sendatsu* Kiyoshi Omura

Question 1: Please explain what a *sendatsu* (pilgrimage guide) is.

Sendatsu Omura: A *sendatsu* is a "pilgrimage leader" and there are two kinds:

a *sendatsu*, and a *konin sendatsu* recognized officially by the regional regulatory organization, the *Shikoku hachijuhachikasho reijoukai.*

To become an official *sendatsu* one must: (1) complete the 88-temple pilgrimage more than four times, (2) be recommended by a priest from one of the 88 temples, and complete the study and training program held by the *Shikoku hachijuhachikasho reijoukai.*

After becoming an official *sendatsu* my work includes the following: (1) to continue visiting the 88 temples, (2) to invite many other people to visit the 88 temples and endeavor to train future leaders, and (3) to gather further knowledge about the temples and various routes to them to better advise the pilgrims I lead.

Question 2: When did you and why did you (i.e. your motivation) wish to become a *sendatsu*?

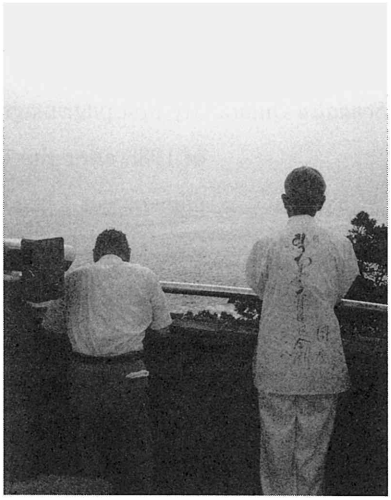
Sendatsu Omura: My first pilgrimage experience was from April to August of 1988 after the death of my wife. After several more pilgrimages I began to think about becoming an official *sendatsu*. In December of 2001, I was recommended by a priest from Senyu-ji (仙遊寺), the 58th temple on the pilgrimage. It took me a year to become a *sendatsu*. My purpose was to learn more about the pilgrimage, as well as to show more people the merits of becoming a pilgrim. I still want more people to know the benefits of making the *Shikoku*

hachijuhachikasho pilgrimage.

In my experience, people often go on the 88-temple pilgrimage because they have met with a misfortune or been involved in trouble. Generally speaking, no one asks pilgrims why they are on a pilgrimage, but I believe that many people go on the pilgrimage to become more composed.

Question 3: Would you please elaborate on any moving experiences you have had as an official *sendatsu* on the 88-temple pilgrimage?

Sendatsu Omura: My deepest impressions of pilgrims that I have lead are those who have expressed a strong desire to return and make the pilgrimage again when they can, as well as discovering many new and more interesting things about the temples (such as, better gardens, buildings, gates and so on).



(photographs by J. Miller: left, walking pilgrims in traditional garb collecting alms; right, pilgrims greet the rising sun at Cape Ashizuri – where Kobo Daishi performed austerities.)

Question 4: Please explain about how you recommend *henro* (pilgrims) to dress and behave while they are while on the pilgrimage.

Sendatsu Omura: The traditional dress of the Shikoku 88-temple pilgrimage includes the following a: *oizuru* (or white shirt), *sugegasa* (or sedge hat), *wagesa* (or stole), *kongo-zue* (or walking staff), *zuda-bukuro* (or bag), and *nenju* (or rosary). However, we don't always wear the standard white shirt, but as becoming a pilgrim is a type of Buddhist training I want pilgrims to at least wear a stole and use a rosary.

Mentally, pilgrims should keep the following ten Buddhist precepts or commandments (*juzenkai* 十善戒): *fussesho* (不殺生) · not harm life, *fuchuto* (不偸盗) · not steal, *fujain* (不邪淫) · not commit adultery, *fumogo* (不妄語) · not lie, *fukigo* (不綺語) · not exaggerate, *fuakuku* (不悪口) · not speak abusively, *furyozetsu* (不両舌) · not equivocate, *fukendon* (不慳貪) · not be greedy, *fushin-ni* (不瞋恚) · not be hateful, and *fujaken* (不邪見) · not lose sight of the truth!

Question 5: Please explain about the two halls: the *hondo* (or main hall) and the *daishido* (or hall honoring Kobo Daishi) at each of the 88 temples.

Sendatsu Omura: The *hondo* (or main hall) of the temple complex is where the main dedicated image of the temple is enshrined and

worshiped. We should begin by visiting the *hondo* at each temple. The *daishido* hall enshrines the image of Kobo Daishi.

Question 6: What religious rites are performed by *henro* when they visit each temple?

Sendatsu Omura: Pilgrims who have prepared well enough (see question 4 above) should wear *hakui* (white clothing) and a *wagesa* (stole) and carry a Buddhist rosary; as well as carry a monetary offering, incense, candles, *osama-fuda* (name slips), and a *nokyocho* (pilgrim's prayer book).

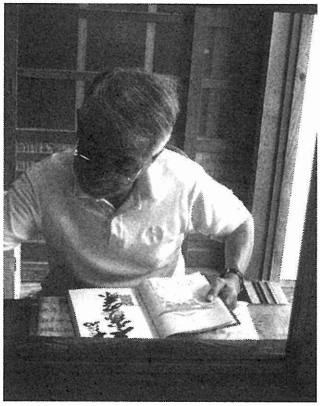
The traditional way to visit each temple is to: (1) join one's palms together and bow once facing the main hall or *hondo* at the main gate, (2) wash one's hands and mouth at the wash basin, (3) ring the bell at the bell tower, (4) place one's name slip (*osama-fuda*) into the name slip box at the *hondo*, (5) light a candle at the *hondo*, (6) burn sticks of incense at the *hondo*, (7) make a momentary offering at the *hondo*, (8) recite a sutra at the *hondo*, (9) place one's name slip (*osama-fuda*) into the name slip box at the *daishido*, (10) light a candle at the *daishido*, (11) burn sticks of incense at the *daishido*, (12) make a momentary offering at the *daishido*, (13) recite a sutra at the *daishido*, and (14) join one's palms together and bow once facing the main hall when leaving the main gate.

Question 7: How do *sendatsu* help with these religious rites?

Sendatsu Omura: Basically, we help in three ways. First, by being a good leader, we advise pilgrims about appropriate clothing, behavior and temple etiquette. Second, we help by making sure that the pilgrims follow the proper procedures at each temple. Third, each *sendatsu* must be knowledgeable about and able to explain the important associations of each temple, as well as know the practical aspects of getting to and from each temple safely and efficiently.

Question 8: Please explain about the inscription and stamping of *nokyocho* (pilgrimage prayer books), *kakejiku* (pilgrimage prayer scrolls), and/or *henro* overshirts at the respective temples visited.

Sendatsu Omura: The pilgrim's *nokyocho* is a notebook made of Japanese paper in which each temple's seal and inscription is affixed on assigned pages. This notebook is proof that the individual has visited each temple. The *kakejiku* (or hanging scroll) also has each temple's seal affixed. However, on the rolled up hanging scroll, a main Buddhist image is depicted in the center and the temples' stamps are placed around it. When complete, many pilgrims display the hanging scroll with all the temple stamps and it becomes a family treasure. We sometimes hang it out to honor our ancestors and at commemorative services for the dead. The *hakui* (or white pilgrim overshirt) also has the seals of each of the temple's seals affixed. It is said that if a dead person is dressed in his or her shirt with all 88 temples' stamps, he or she will go to a spiritually awakened world.



(Left photographs by J. Miller, my *nokyocho* book being inscribed at Okubo-ji 大窪寺, the 88th temple; right, an explanation about proper etiquette during meals at pilgrim lodgings from the Reizan-ji temple published booklet: *Shikoku henro*: *saho to okyo no imi.*)

Question 9: Please explain about the *kongo-tsue* (pilgrim's staff) and *osame-fuda* (pilgrim's name slips), including the five ranks of *osame-fuda*.

Sendatsu Omura: The pilgrim's *kongo-tsue* is a walking staff and is said to be the embodiment of Kobo Daishi who guides each pilgrim. Interestingly, we do not use our *kongo-tsue* when we walk across a bridge because of the Toyagabashi transmission.* We can think of this staff is a tool to walk with, as well as spiritual support. In the past, the staff was used as a grave marker for pilgrims who passed away along the journey.

*(The Toyagabashi transmission refers to the story about Kobo Daishi sleeping under the Toyaga Bridge 十夜ヶ橋 close to Eitoku-ji 永徳寺, *bangai* temple number

8 on his pilgrimage.)

On *osame-fuda* (name slips) we write our intention, name, address, and the date we visited the temple. (They were made of wood a long time ago and people nailed them on various pillars of each temple.) Today, the color of one's name slip is decided by the number of completed pilgrimages: 1~4 times = white, 5~7 times = green, 8~24 times = red, 25~49 times = silver, 50~99 times = gold, and 100~plus times = brocade.

Question 10: What is the importance of chanting the *Hannya shingyo* (Heart Sutra) or singing the *go-eika* (pilgrimage songs) at each pilgrimage temple?

Sendatsu Omura: The reason why we recite the *Hannya shingyo* is because this sutra contains the necessary wisdom for our spiritual awakening. It tells us that all is vanity and demonstrates all the steps of spiritual training in addition to its final goal. Often, people recite the *Hannya shingyo* to help the spirit of a dead person attain nirvana.

Originally *go-eika* were recited to worship the Buddha as the songs often describe the landscape around the each temple and its history. The practice of singing *go-eika* has been passed on by generations of pilgrims from the old days.

Question 11: Could you please explain about the Shikoku pilgrimage concept

of *dogyo ninin* (going together with Kobo Daishi)?

Sendatsu Omura: The meaning is that, in principal, we are always with Kobo Daishi at each of the temples along the pilgrimage journey even if we are traveling alone. This phrase is written on our sedge hat, white shirt, name slips and so on. This phrase originally means "going with Kobo Daishi," but we can say we are also together with the dead when we go on a pilgrimage to remember someone who has passed on.

Question 12: Please discuss the custom of *o-settai* (giving/receiving alms).

Sendatsu Omura: *O-settai* is a kind of service to pilgrims (for example, a gift of food, money, or a free place to stay) as a way of encouraging the pilgrim and participating in his or her *henro*. Of the many kinds of *o-settai* the most common include: giving the pilgrim food and drink, providing a rest station for pilgrims is called *settai-jo* (接待所), and opening one's house to traveling *henro*, which is called *zenkonyado* (善根宿).

The motivation for *o-settai* is empathy with and sympathy for the ascetic pilgrims, as well as the Daishi belief that people want to accumulate good deeds and receive blessings. Furthermore, *o-settai* is considered as a service for our ancestors. Individuals who give *o-settai* wish for that pilgrim to succeed on his or her pilgrimage and to symbolically "join in" in with his or her effort. Therefore, the givers provide the service in return for the opportunity to metaphorically participate. Pilgrims try to get as much *o-settai* as possible, and offer their name slips in return.

Question 13: What mental and physical preparation would you recommend for people who wish to become *henro*?

Sendatsu Omura: Regarding the intent of persons wishing to go on the Shikoku 88-temple pilgrimage, whatever method of travel pilgrims may use, the most important thing is that he or she is strongly determined to complete the pilgrimage. (Also, see the answer to question 4 above.)

For walking pilgrims it is important to have much time, physical strength, and enough money. It is generally said that it takes about 45 days for men and about 60 days for women to complete the pilgrimage on foot. For pilgrims traveling by car, they must sleep well before starting out on the pilgrimage and check their car well beforehand.

Question 14: Why do you believe that the 88-temple Shikoku pilgrimage is important today (for Japanese and for non-Japanese)?

Sendatsu Omura: My main reason to believe in the modern day importance of the Shikoku pilgrimage is that for every pure-hearted *henro*, visiting each temple on the entire pilgrimage is an opportunity to enter sacred territory. Furthermore, the entire journey around the temples provides the time and opportunity to think deeply about himself or herself. Thus, pilgrims have the opportunity to reflect on their lives. This is quite rare these days as everyone is so busy. Some people will use the pilgrimage as an opportunity to come to grips with personal misfortune and distress (which we all must face, sooner or later in our lives).

Although we humans come from many different countries and believe in many kinds of religions, the 88-temple Shikoku pilgrimage and Kobo Daishi welcome everyone equally.

Question 15: Today Shikoku pilgrims walk, bicycle, drive (their own vehicles) or go on commercial tours, how are these different?

Sendatsu Omura: There are many kinds of ways to undertake the 88-temple Shikoku pilgrimage. Much more important than the means of transportation used, is that each *henro* has a strong reason to make such a spiritual journey. We humans only carry out the things that we strongly determine to do.

Question 16: What is your opinion of bus tour companies such as those of Iyo Tetsu (which became the first *sendatsu* when the system was started in the 1960s)?

Sendatsu Omura: A pilgrimage bus is a good method for people who have long wanted to go on the Shikoku pilgrimage for the following five reasons: (1) The schedule is fixed so the group can proceed safely and efficiently; (2) The onboard *sendatsu* explains the significance of each temple on route; (3) As the tour conductor takes care of *nokyocho*, scrolls and white overshirts, the pilgrims can concentrate on visiting the respective temples and reciting prayers; (4) There is quick and effective transport of the pilgrims to the next temple; and (5) The tour company deals with the route and traffic problems, as well as reserves the needed places to stay and makes all the eating arrangements.

Question 17: What should *henro* do when staying at a *shukubo* (or temple lodging)?

Sendatsu Omura: The standard etiquette when staying at a *shukubo* is: first, to wash one's walking staff before entering the accommodation and then place it in the tokonoma (or alcove in traditional Japanese rooms designed for works of art or veneration); second, to pray before and after meals (see photo five pages ago); third, to use the facilities quietly so as not to trouble others; and lastly, to go to bed early to get an early start for the next day's pilgrimage.

Question 18: What have you found most challenging or difficult about being a *sendatsu*?

Sendatsu Omura: My ongoing challenge is to learn more about Buddhism, get more knowledge of each of the 88 temples, and continue to tell others about the merits of the Shikoku pilgrimage.

(IV) Conclusion

Our 2009 borderless, 24/7, digital world poses many unique spiritual challenges for postmodern humans. However, the fundamental trajectory of human life is the same as it always has been. Like our ninth century ancestors, alive when Kobo Daishi was, we were conceived by our parents and after nine or ten months in our mother's womb – born. Initially helpless, our mothers and fathers cared for us and we grew and learned. As young adults, we began to work in society and many of us found a mate, and possibly raised children of our own. As we have continued to age, our

parents, teachers and many others around us have died – reminding us of our inevitable end; that eventually each of us too will become sick and die (those of us less fortunate, will be sadly killed in wars or by unforeseen accidents).

The final destination of everyone's life's journey is death, but none of us know when or how our individual life-journey will end. Of course, some of us – or our offspring – will die tragically young, others suffer inexplicably before dying: all of which has always produced great psychological anxiety. Historically, religion and philosophy have tried to make sense of this central life dilemma. The pilgrimage, universal across cultures and throughout human history, is one attempt to help people to cope with life's great conundrums. For the *hajj* Muslims swirling around the sacred Kaaba in Mecca this month of Ramadan, there is a clear destination. For certain Shikoku *henro* – I observed on my 2004~7 pilgrimages – who slept in rough outside roofed shelters to get an early start for the next temple, their pilgrimage is circular and they wished to close the circle. Almost all of us pilgrims, seek to effect an internal change so that "the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time." (T.S. Eliot, from *Little Gidding* in the *Four Quartets.*) Even this short research paper is something like a mini-pilgrimage.

In 1984, I attended a lecture by Oliver Statler about his new book *Japanese Pilgrimage*. It was fascinating, however with two young children I knew my pilgrimage would have to wait. My chance came years later, when the Ministry of Education and Science asked me to train secondary English teachers in Kochi. I began visiting the temples in the immediate area and in neighboring Tokushima. Then I visited beautiful Matsuyama in Ehime and I met *sendatsu* Omura who explained so much about the pilgrimage. These discussions added depth to my rereading of Statler's – and later Ian Reader's

and Bishop Miyata's – books.

On the Shikoku pilgrim pathways I met some non-Japanese, and the temple priests and fellow *henro* seemed quite interested in foreigners who were making the pilgrimage. At this point, *sendatsu* Omura and I decided to do this interview to help non-Japanese *henro*. It has been a pleasure and great honor working with him. I hope that we have contributed in some small way to the internationalization of Shikoku's 88-temple pilgrimage.

Today, bustling Japan is one of the world's most international countries, keenly interested in what foreigners think. And, many non-Japanese are equally eager to directly experience and participate in Japanese culture from ubiquitous *anime* cartoons to esoteric Noh drama, as evidenced by the significant increase of foreign *henro*. Therefore, it is fitting to write briefly about Frederick Starr the first foreigner to make the Shikoku pilgrimage in 1921 (see one of Starr's English temple inscriptions fourteen pages ago).

As a retired 31-year professor of anthropology from the University of Chicago and an early Japanophile, Dr. Starr was invited to the Taisho emperor's coronation, climbed Mt. Fuji three times (once by the most dangerous route), visited Mt. Koya twice, received the Order of the Sacred Treasure, was in Tokyo when the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake struck, and died in Tokyo (St. Luke's Hospital) in 1933.

Professor Starr was visiting Japan in 1904 on "the day war was declared between Japan and Russia; he returned to the U.S. proclaiming that Japan would win.... The war was not between nations, he said, but between races.... '(Asia) is slowly and surely moving toward that great part it is to play in the world's history. Japan is opening the way for this progress, but she will not ultimately be the supreme nation. China is without doubt destined to hold this position. It has the latent power. In time it will rule the world.'" (Statler, 1983, 238) Starr's amazing 1904 remarks foreshadowed Samuel Huntington's

thesis on civilization culture clashes by ninety years and recent geopolitical financial developments by 100 years! As he predicted, the world's locus has shifted significantly eastward; so much so, that his 1921 Shikoku temple inscriptions might be rewritten and combined as, "Welcome to the Asian 21st century; International Peace and Friendship" for today.

However, as *sendatsu* Omura Kiyoshi has wisely pointed out, pilgrimages, such as the Shikoku 88-temple *henro*, allow us to follow holy individuals, in this case Kobo Daishi, as well as millions of our ancestors' footsteps over hallowed ground. By making this spiritual journey, we have the opportunity to reflect on the ultimate truth of our personal tragedies and triumphs. Furthermore, by reaching deep into ourselves at such sacred sites we can feel united with the dead who we will soon follow, as well as our fellow pilgrims. For, in the "life is a pilgrimage" metaphor all humans, living and dead, are fellow pilgrims on life's journey.

Are ancient pilgrimages an effective antidote to postmodern angst? Upon completion of the Shikoku 88-temple Pilgrimage, many *henro* describe their experience as humbling, calming, and focusing (on life's central concerns) – the clutter and constant static of today's world disappears and life seems simpler and more manageable. Also, many pilgrims express a sense of profound unity: first of all, for the camaraderie with the actual individuals with whom they visited the various temples, but also with all other past and present *henro*, their departed loved ones, and ultimately with all other living things as well as the cosmos itself. Such responses seem to point to an affirmative response to the question about an antidote; as does the November 26, 2007 *U.S. News & World Report* that, "some ten million visitors are expected (to follow the Way of St. James) in Santiago for the 2010 Holy Year."

(V) References for Citations

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